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ARCHES NATIONAL PARK TO GET NEW VISITOR CENTER, MILLENNIUM TRAIL CORRIDOR TO GET INCREASED PROTECTION

More than \$32 million in Bennett's requests for Utah interior projects get approval from Senate committee

WASHINGTON, D.C. – In its approval of legislation to fund the Department of Interior for the next fiscal year, the Senate Appropriations Committee today endorsed \$32.5 million for Utah projects requested by Sen. Bob Bennett including funds for a new visitor center at Arches National Park and land acquisition along Utah's new Millennium Trail protecting it from encroaching development.

"The new Millennium Trail is a wonderful resource in our state," said Bennett. "Its establishment and maintenance is a partnership in the best sense – from the countless citizens who volunteer their time and energy for its upkeep, to efforts at the federal level to protect its sensitive zones from development."

"Visitors traveling to see Arches National Park, known throughout the world for its natural wonders, deserve to find first-rate facilities and services in addition to spectacular scenery and breathtaking vistas," said Bennett, a member of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior. "The one million visitors coming to the park annually can't be adequately accommodated in a facility built to serve 100,000. These funds will help improve the visitor experience at this beautiful spot."

Following is a breakdown of Bennett requests which received approval today:

- ***\$1.2 million for planning and design of a new visitor center at Arches National Park.***

In addition to its inability to serve the number of visitors coming to the Park every year, the present structure is not in complete compliance with accessibility and safety codes.

- ***\$2.5 million for land acquisition along the Bonneville Shoreline Trail.***

The Bonneville Shoreline Trail, recently designated the Utah Millennium Trail, a ninety-mile path for pedestrians and bicycles, follows a route that lies generally on or near the eastern shoreline of ancient Lake Bonneville from North Ogden to

Payson. As part of the Forest Service and communities' efforts to identify key properties and willing sellers along the trail to see that other development does not encroach on the trail and trail heads, Bennett has secured federal funding to purchase these lands. Since 1996 Bennett has been successful in appropriating \$3.4 million toward these efforts with today's approval of \$2.5 million bringing that total to \$5.9 million.

- ***Funds necessary (\$500,000 and up) for a replacement aircraft at Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.***

Glen Canyon has used a light aircraft since 1972 to support law enforcement, search and rescue, and other general logistics missions. The rapidly increasing visitation in the new Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument has also increased the need for aviation activity. Multiple law enforcement jurisdictions require joint operations for mission effectiveness. These funds are intended to replace a 15-year-old aircraft that does not meet Department of Interior standards because of safety and maintenance concerns.

- ***\$2.5 million for ongoing construction of an Education Center at the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge.***

The Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge is the most important refuge for migrating waterfowl in the Intermountain Region. Devastating flooding in the early 1980s destroyed the infrastructure of the entire area, including the visitor center. Funds appropriated through this request will provide for the continued construction of an Education Center to replace the destroyed visitor facilities. The Friends of the Bear River Bird Refuge have also committed to raise \$1.5 million in private funding for this facility.

- ***\$200,000 to provide technical and educational assistance to private forest land owners and forestry specialists on issues related to timber sales, harvesting, and site reclamation.***

A reduction by the federal government in allowable timber harvest from National Forest lands has greatly increased the demand for timber from private land owners. Selling timber is a new experience for many private land owners and forestry education is a necessity for private land owners to help them make informed choices and decisions about harvesting operations on their lands.

- ***\$600,000 for continuation of wilderness mapping in Utah (FY 2000 level was \$300,000).***

Currently no centralized Geologic Information System (GIS) database of wilderness inventories for the USFS or BLM exists. This program would involve the compilation, analysis and integration of GIS related information into a user-friendly package that could be accessed by public and private entities for purposes

of land use planning. The state of Utah will receive the funds from the BLM and distribute them to the appropriate counties in the state.

- ***\$200,000 for completion of forest inventory on the Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation.***

These funds will allow the tribe to actively manage its forest lands and provide valuable timber to small mill operators throughout the Uintah Basin. The supply of timber harvested from tribally-managed lands is especially significant to the small mill operators due to the lack of timber coming from the USFS. The USFS at one time was the major supplier to these small mills. With this no longer the case, the timber harvested from the Ute Tribe is the last hope of a steady supply for the remaining small mills.

- ***\$24,833,000 funding level for Ute Indian Rights Settlement contained in the president's budget.***

This full funding level is of critical importance because of the government's necessity to meet the settlement deadline of January 1, 2005.

- ***\$145 million PILT funding level. This constitutes a \$10 million dollar increase over the FY 2000 level.***

With federal ownership of some rural counties in Utah as high as 92 percent, these areas are the base providers of services for millions of visitors to public lands. The services the counties provide include: solid waste disposal, law enforcement, road maintenance, and search and rescue. Because PILT payments have not kept pace with inflation, the counties are experiencing what is in effect a significant decrease in payments. This has placed Utah counties in the situation of having to provide services of all types to visitors of federal lands without adequate compensation from the federal government. Without annual increases in PILT funding, counties will be forced to cut back services which the federal agencies do not have the capacity to assume.

The FY2001 Department of Interior Appropriations Bill now proceeds to the full Senate for its approval.

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<http://www.senate.gov/~bennett>